

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda, and Barbara Pezzotti, eds.
The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations. London and New York: Continuum, 2012.
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This book consists of three major parts, discussing three major features of crime fiction: the setting, the detective, and the villain. Part One is entitled “Inside Out or Outside In? The Scene of the Crime as Exotic Décor.” “The scene of the crime” does not mean crime scene here, rather the general setting, a city, a country or a whole region. These chapters make important distinctions, criticizing certain authors who perform the orientalis-ing, colonizing, Eurocentric gaze on exotic places and peoples (e.g. Caryl Férey in chapter 1 by Ellen Carter and Deborah Walker-Morrison, or Irène Bertaud and Chantal Kardilès in chapter 5 by Jean Anderson), and praising others who undermine or expose such attitudes (e.g. John le Carré in chapter 2 by Sabine Vanacker, or Daniel Zié-Mé in Chapter 5 by Jean Anderson). The selection of texts examined in this cluster is, however, undeniably Eurocentric. Exotic places—to whom? Foreigners—where? The settings discussed in the five chapters of Part One are as follows: New Zealand, South-East Asia, Havana, Shanghai, and the Franco-Pacific area. Exotic places, for sure—to Western readers. Of course, the books scrutinized are mostly written for Western readers, therefore the central role of exoticism in the discourse can be accepted as legitimate. But it is legitimized only by the selection of the books the authors choose. Could there be other options using different selection strategies? Perhaps, yes. I refer to one single example to suggest another strategy, *Amalfi* (or *Amarufi*) by Juichi Shimpo, a Japanese crime story in an Italian setting.¹ Europe also can be an exotic place with strange local habits. There is no doubt that one can find other such examples. But, such books would undermine the author’s politically correct premise: if a French writer gives a completely false representation of Maori habits due to a superficial knowledge of the local culture of New

Zealand, it can be criticised as European arrogance. But what can be said if Italian public safety in 2009 is represented in a Japanese book as if we were in the 1960s? What about the depiction of exotic inferiority in Italian police work? (Of course, such a portrayal follows the generic tradition of presenting professional policemen as stupid in comparison to ingenious outsiders. But it also supports another thematic dealing with interracial prejudice.)

Maybe a Japanese novel is not “international” enough (in the sense of circulation) for this volume even though a movie based on the novel may make it acceptable as such. Even if a writer originally writes for a domestic audience, once her book has gained international recognition, as in the case of Padura Fuentes’s Havana stories, it may be included in this volume. The examination of “Havana *noir*” by Philip Swanson (chapter 3) is particularly telling: Fuentes may have elicited international interest in Havana as the setting for crime fiction, but the chapter focuses primarily on non-Cuban writers who use the setting to display nostalgia for the pre-Castro nightlife of the city, which no longer exists and is more of a myth than a remembered cultural experience. Leonardo Padura Fuentes and his novel *La cola de la Serpiente* are also examined in the very last chapter of the book (chapter 16) by Carlos Uxó. He is criticized for his inability to rid himself of stereotypical clichéd representations of Chinese-Cuban minorities.

The title of Part Two (“Private Eyes, Hybrid Eyes: The In-Between Detective”) suggests its epistemological focus: how can a foreign (or at least partially foreign) detective understand a community enough to carry out a successful investigation? In chapter 6, Stewart King astutely analyses the novels of Rosa Ribas, who writes in Spanish but sets her story in Frankfurt. The really in-between (half Spanish half German) detective, Cornelia Weber-Tejedor not only finds the perpetrators, but during her investigation also comes to a better (albeit rather dark) understanding of both the life of the Spanish immigrant community, and German society’s anxious reaction to multicultural reality. In chapter 7, France Grenaudier-Klijn is less interested in crime narrative than in why the genre of crime fiction is so important in postmodern French literature. According to Grenaudier-Klijn, the life of a pair of amateur investigators who appear in several novels by Dominique Sylvain proves that friendship, or rather the multicultural network of friendships, is the only really significant human value.

The next four chapters of Part Two compare different pairs of writers. In chapter 8, John and Marie Ramsland examine Australian authors who showcase aboriginal detectives, as in the case of Arthur Upfield in the 1920s and 1930s and Philip McLaren in the present. In chapter 9 and chapter 11,

Conan Doyle is compared to contemporary French rewriters of his fiction. Alistair Rolls first discusses a novel by Fred Vargas, and Keren Chiaroni then looks at Sherlock Holmes adaptations by Fabrice Bourland. In chapter 10, Andrew Nestingen and Paula Arvas compare a Danish book from 1992, Peter Høeg's *Smilla's Sense of Snow*, with a Swedish trilogy from the 2000s, Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy*. Their conclusion, that Larsson works with too radical and excessive otherness, while understandable, lacks a certain subtlety.

Part One discusses contemporary crime fiction. Le Carré's *Karla* trilogy, which dates from the 1970s, was the only (and not really old) exception to this chronology. Part Two examines earlier examples of crime fiction, comparing them to more recent texts. The contemporary focus, however, is not a rule in this book, and the first two chapters of Part Three discuss considerably older material. In chapter 12, Andrew Francis analyses British juvenile spy fiction between 1900–1914, and notes how this xenophobic writing, succeeded in soliciting anti-German sentiment not only in Britain, but also throughout the British Empire, and resulted in “the speed, with which imperial societies mobilized against Germany in August 1914” and showed how their hostile attitude “was maintained throughout four years of fighting” (164). In chapter 13, Carolina Miranda examines Roberto Arlt's criminal short stories, in which the petty crimes of miserable characters offer an opportunity for the realistic representation of the social and historical situation in Buenos Aires in the 1930s and the crucial role foreigners play in this context. It should be noted that these three chapters on non-contemporary crime fiction and the three chapters comparing old and new achievements, call into question the structure of the book as a whole. Accepting that the topic is “transcultural representation,” why are we not given chapters on the classics like Christie and Chandler? Does Hercule Poirot's name not first come to mind when thinking of “the foreign in crime fiction”?

In the opening sentence of this review I wrote that Part Three is about the foreign villain; this is, however, not completely true. It is called “When Evil Walks Abroad—Towards a Politics of Otherness,” and its chapters discuss the representation of immigrant communities in crime fiction: Germans in pre-WWI Britain, the wide variety of immigrants in inter-war Argentina, immigrants in Italy (chapter 14 by Barbara Pezzotti), Turks in Germany (chapter 15 by Margaret Sutherland), and the Chinese community in Cuba. The perpetrators in the stories discussed in this part are members of immigrant communities, but sometimes they are also its

victims. In chapter 14, a comparison between Massimo Carlotto and Andrea Camilleri demonstrates a basic difference between northern and southern Italian (crime fiction) attitudes towards immigrants. In the north, there is basic hostility against the not really differentiated immigrants who do harm to well-established and traditional Italian criminal groups. Because the south has for decades provided migrant workers and as a consequence, experienced exclusion, it is presented as it has developed a more welcoming attitude. Southern Italy is presented as part of an ever-changing Mediterranean scene, where populations travel where and when they can or where and when they are needed. Tunisians are not regarded as immigrating but returning to places they once had to abandon (181). Chapter 15 compares a 2007 *Tatort* episode (268, “Wem Ehre gebührt”) with W. W. Domsky’s novel *Ehre, wem Ehre ...*, published in 2009. The former is a careful study of immigrant life and xenophobia, in which the detective has to learn during the investigation that her first hypotheses, based on ethnic stereotypes, are all wrong. The latter is a rather unsophisticated collection of xenophobic stereotypes. However, Sutherland does not simply compare two crime stories but examines how they are presented in the different media and, therefore elicit different public reactions. In the television medium, the crime committed by a person was seen as an individual act and had nothing to do with the culprit’s national or religious background. The local national community, the Alevis, reacted so fiercely to this episode that it has never been broadcast again. While the Alevis thought that the fictional representation of a member of the community committing a crime spread unfair stereotypes, the much more hostile novel by Domsky has not caused any negative reaction. Clearly television has a much greater impact on community life than print literature. This conclusion prompts the following question: can a collective approach to international crime fiction afford to focus exclusively on printed novels? All the other chapters, if they mention film adaptations at all, explicitly refuse to analyse them; Margaret Sutherland’s chapter proves that there is great potential perhaps to be found in such inter-media comparisons.

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1. I have to express my gratitude to Takayuki Yokota-Murakami for providing me this study’s example.